



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mark Twain National Forest
Poplar Bluff Ranger District

1420 W. Maud St., P.O. Box 988
Poplar Bluff, MO 63901-0988
(573) 785-1475 FAX (573) 785-0267
TTY (573) 785-0484

File Code: 1900

Date: August 23, 2004

Dear Friends, Neighbors and Interested Parties,

The Poplar Bluff Ranger District, Mark Twain National Forest, is proposing resource management activities on Forest Service Lands administered by the district. These management activities will be covered in a project named: **Tornado Area Prescribed Burning and Reforestation– Poplar Bluff**. They are described in further detail in the Project Summary and associated maps found on this website.

This letter and request for comments is the initial stage (Scoping) of public involvement for this project. We are requesting comments regarding this proposed activity before we make a final decision as to how, or whether or not, to proceed with the project. **We ask that your comments be as site specific as possible.** Experience has shown us that specific comments on a project proposal are more useful to us during our analysis than general comments that could apply anywhere across the Mark Twain National Forest or elsewhere.

If additional information is desired on this project, it may be obtained in a number of ways:

- Telephone: Contact, Bill Paxton at the Poplar Bluff Ranger District Office during business hours (8:00a.m. – 4:30 p.m. CST) at 573-785-1475.
- In writing: Contact, Poplar Bluff Ranger District, P.O. Box 988, Poplar Bluff, Missouri 63902. Attention: **Tornado Area Prescribed Burning and Reforestation– Poplar Bluff**
- Facsimile requests: Address to: Bill Paxton, Resource Analyst, at 573-785-0267.
- E-mail requests can be sent to the electronic mailbox at comments-eastern-mark-twain-poplar-bluff@fs.fed.us.
- Web site viewing: View vicinity map, project maps, and this letter at: www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/projects/project.htm. Scroll down to **Tornado Area Prescribed Burning and Reforestation– Poplar Bluff**

Please submit your written input to the Poplar Bluff office by close of business September 22, 2004. Electronic comments should be sent to: comments-eastern-mark-twain-poplar-bluff@fs.fed.us. Faxed comments should be sent to (573)-785-0267. When submitting comments, be sure to include your name, current physical mailing address, title of the proposed action (**Tornado Area Prescribed Burning and Reforestation– Poplar Bluff**) and signature or other verification of identity upon request. You will also find a comment form on this same website you can fill out and send to the address listed on the form. The form is self-explanatory. In addition, you may also visit our office at 1420 Maud Street in Poplar Bluff, MO 63901 during normal business hours (Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.).



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If you have any questions about the proposal or our analysis process, please contact the Poplar Bluff Ranger District Office at the number above. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Henry B. Hickerson
HENRY B. HICKERSON
District Ranger

PROJECT #40410 SUMMARY
***Tornado Area Prescribed Burning and Reforestation– Poplar Bluff
Carter and Butler Counties, Missouri***

Project Areas

The project areas are located in Compartments 110, 112, 116, 119, 120, 133, 135, 137, 138, 139, and 142, respectively. All are on the Poplar Bluff Ranger District, Mark Twain National Forest.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to first prescribe burn specific stands in those compartments identified on the attached map to reduce excessive fuel loading conditions created by a tornado in April 2002, and second, aerial seed and/or plant to help restore certain stand areas to more naturally appearing forest conditions. It is a revision of an earlier project (#40210 – Prescribed Burning and Restoration-related Activities in Specific tornado-damaged Stands) that was sent out on December 16, 2003 for public comment. On February 26, 2004, Acting District Ranger Don Fish signed a Decision Memo to implement planting only. The remaining project activities were deferred pending further review and analysis. That review and analysis is now complete. This revised project proposal is a result, and is considered a new project for National Environmental Policy Act purposes.

A maximum of 3,839 acres would be treated by prescribed burning activities. All areas are within the path of the tornado or within the immediate vicinity. Additional area is required to reduce the amount of constructed fireline. Prescribed burning activities would be implemented beginning in late 2004 or early 2005. Additional treatments over the next ten years may be required to further reduce fuel-loading conditions, as well as establish and maintain better growing conditions for residual trees in the restored areas. Additional prescribed burning treatments would be implemented on an as needed basis, generally on a 3-5 year rotational basis.

Firelines exist around the majority of the areas, and natural breaks would be used wherever feasible. Approximately three additional miles of fireline may be required. This would impact approximately 2 net acres of forestland.

Regeneration (growth of new trees) has been slow to re-establish in certain areas despite site preparation and salvage logging efforts. Aerial seeding and/or hand planting of native short leaf pine would be utilized to re-establish those stands severely damaged by a tornado.

Background

On April 24, 2002, a tornado cut diagonally across the Poplar Bluff Ranger District for a distance of 23 miles. Another tornado touched down on the Potosi-Fredericktown Ranger District for approximately 14 miles. Both tornados sustained winds of 207-260 mph.

The tornado created major alterations to fuel accumulations (fuel loads) in areas along its path. Whole trees were up-rooted, tops broken off, and stems splintered. Alterations to the fuels conditions include an increase of five to twenty-five times the overall fuel load from pre-tornado conditions. Hazardous fuel conditions create the potential for severe forest fires that could have a significant effect on the health and safety of the public and firefighters in the area. If a wildfire were to occur, state and county roadways are at risk of receiving heavy smoke resulting in unsafe conditions for vehicles.

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The private property and the citizens who live near or visit the area are at risk due to this increased potential for severe wild fire. The ability to respond to and safely suppress potential fires is severely decreased by the large fuel accumulations and the physical obstacles created by the downed trees.

The fuel loading caused by the tornados on National Forest lands threatens approximately 478 valuable structures within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of the tornados' paths. Thirty-eight of those structures are within 250 feet of National Forest land on the Poplar Bluff District.

The Forest Service asked the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) for alternative arrangements for NEPA compliance for emergency treatment of the hazardous fuels and to reduce the potential for high intensity wildland fires occurring on National Forest lands from spreading onto the intermingled private ownerships. CEQ approved the agency's request and issued "Alternative Arrangements Workplan for Compliance with The National Environmental Policy Act" (Alternative Arrangements) on July 12, 2002.

Alternative Arrangements also listed ten provisions for compliance. The second provision required the Forest Service to identify actions that needed to be taken as soon as possible to address public safety concerns and imminent risk to valuable private property, and to identify actions that would be considered over the longer term under the normal NEPA process. The latter actions were deferred because they did not require immediate action to reduce risk of catastrophic fire, lie outside a $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile limiting zone established under Alternative Arrangements, or could not be assessed until initial treatments authorized by CEQ were accomplished.

The third and fourth provisions required the Forest Service to prepare and distribute for review and comment an environmental analysis document (EAD). This document was a companion to the July 31, 2002 "Final Programmatic Environmental Analysis for Fuel Reduction Activities to be Implemented on the Mark Twain National Forest under Alternative NEPA Arrangements Granted by the Council on Environmental Quality" (Final PEA).

CEQ limited the Alternative Arrangements to those actions necessary to reduce fire risks to acceptable levels on those areas with valuable structures within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of National Forest land affected by the tornados. Since that time, several of the areas (nine identified for administrative purposes) that were most severely affected by the tornado event were salvage logged to reduce the extreme fuel-loading conditions. Several others had a firebreak constructed around them, and a few received relatively no treatments at all.

Deferred were additional treatments not authorized for emergency actions through Alternative Arrangements, and would be considered over the longer term under normal NEPA processes. Some areas did not require immediate actions to reduce risk of catastrophic fire, were outside the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile-limiting zones, or couldn't be assessed until authorized treatments under Alternative Arrangements were accomplished. Potential actions that were initially identified included such things as: additional fuels reduction (prescribed burning, etc.), trail maintenance and/or relocation, reforestation, stream course restoration, road maintenance/rehabilitation, recreation area restoration, old growth designations, interpretation opportunities, and visual enhancements.

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Salvage and other operations authorized under Alternative Arrangements are complete, and most of the large diameter fuels removed. Treatments remaining to be done include prescribed burning to reduce fuel-loading conditions, reforestation, interpretive information, including signing, and visual resource mitigation/enhancements. Other treatments, such as recreation area restoration and trail maintenance were already been addressed under separate decisions.

The post-tornado fuels are in an almost continuous bed with a deep, loosely arranged mix of light, medium, and heavy fuels. The fuels are arranged in a continuous horizontal layer with few breaks except for cleared roads and areas that have been salvaged. All fuels on or near the ground are available to carry a fire. Normally, this means only the leaf litter/pine needles/small shrubs with fuel loadings of around 2 tons/acre. Under pre-tornado fuel conditions, heavy fuels existed, but in low quantities and scattered sparsely across the forest floor. When fire hit them, it usually did not ignite the entire log, and may have gone out entirely depending on how moist the log was. Under pre-tornado extreme or drought conditions however, these large logs would fully ignite.

Fuel loading surveys were conducted in both tornado paths during May-June 2002. Fuel loading ranges from 12-22 tons/acre for 100-hour fuels and from 35-78 tons/acre for 1000-hour fuels. This means that now, even the heavy fuels are likely to ignite and contribute to fire behavior. To estimate fire behavior in these fuels, the existing fuel model with heaviest fuel loadings was used. However, this model considers heavy logging slash as the fire carrying fuel, and assumes that all the logs have been removed with only slash left on-site. In the case of the tornado-affected areas, not only does heavy slash exist, whole trees provide fuel. This means the model predicts fire behavior less than what could actually occur and makes determining potential fire behavior and effects more complex.

Purpose and Need

Address resource management activities (prescribed burning, aerial seeding and/or hand planting) not authorized for emergency action under Alternative Arrangements granted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and not addressed under other NEPA authority.

Decisions to be Made

Whether or not to conduct specific resource management activities not authorized under Alternative Arrangements (prescribed burning, aerial seeding and/or hand planting) in certain tornado-damaged compartments and stands on the Poplar Bluff Ranger District to help restore these areas to more naturally appearing forest conditions.

Target Date for Completion of Analysis and a decision

September 2004

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Prescribed Burning Treatments to Reduce Fuel Accumulations and Restoration-related Activities in Specific Tornado-Damaged Areas

<i>Name of Area</i>	<i>Compartments</i>	<i>Acres</i>
Wiley King	110 and 112	380
Cane Creek-Walton Chapel	110 and 142	628
North and South Goose Creek	116 and 137	785
Oak Lookout	119	490
Oak Brier	120 and 133	147
Three Springs	133	262
South Goose Creek	138	353
Victory	139	794
Total Acres		3,839

Specific Aerial Seeding and/or Planting Areas

COMPARTMENT	STAND	GIS Acres	SALE NAME
00110	046	31.19	Walton Chapel
00110	047	19.60	Walton Chapel
00110	048	21.30	Walton Chapel
00110	057	1.94	Walton Chapel
00110	061	10.93	Walton Chapel
00110	062	11.06	Walton Chapel
	6 stands	96.02	

00142	001	26.02	Walton Chapel
00142	002	32.69	Cane Creek
00142	003	35.38	Cane Creek
00142	004	10.90	Cane Creek
00142	006	43.26	Cane Creek
00142	007	4.70	Cane Creek
00142	008	30.72	Cane Creek
00142	010	19.22	Cane Creek
00142	011	1.17	Cane Creek
00142	012	9.10	Cane Creek
00142	013	26.31	Cane Creek
00142	014	8.76	Cane Creek
00142	015	15.82	Cane Creek
00142	016	39.98	Cane Creek
00142	017	12.10	Cane Creek

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COMPARTMENT	STAND	GIS Acres	SALE NAME
00142	052	9.21	Cane Creek
00142	057	17.18	Cane Creek
00142	058	0.12	Cane Creek
00142	060	1.79	Cane Creek
00142	060	0.04	Cane Creek
	19 stands	1/ 344.47	

00135	012	11.30	Three Springs
00135	013	10.60	Three Springs
00135	015	20.80	Three Springs
00135	019	11.80	Three Springs
00135	020	18.40	Three Springs
00135	022	8.10	Three Springs
00135	023	31.90	Three Springs
00135	026	20.70	Three Springs
00135	027	22.10	Three Springs
00135	028	28.10	Three Springs
00135	029	7.90	Three Springs
00135	030	12.10	Three Springs
	12 stands	2/ 203.80	
5 Compartments	37 stands	3/ 644.29	

NOTES Aerial Seed and/or Planting only

1/ Acreage figure from earlier scoping document has been revised to reflect mathematical error. Net change of +11.29 acres

2/ Acreage figure from earlier scoping document has been revised to reflect mathematical error. Net change of –1.0 acre.

3/ Acreage figure from earlier scoping document has been revised to reflect mathematical error. Net total change of +10.29 acres